Pulpit Preaching

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Worth Quoting 2
E. Paul Hovey

WORDS FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT

The Vision of the Plumb-Line 3
Donald Macleod

Leaning a Ladder Against Heaven 7
Clarence J. Forsberg

Run, Jonah, Run 10
Robert B. Wallace

LESSONS FOR LENT

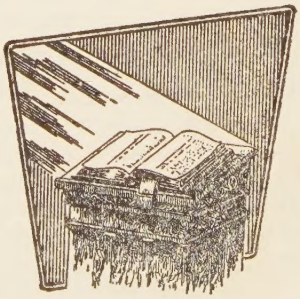
The Fellowship of the Forgiven 14
Edwin T. Dahlberg

Oedipus the King and Christ the Lord 17
Thomas C. Oden

God's Use of Man's Weakness 20
Henry Pope Mobley, Jr.

The New Look 24
Ben F. Lehmberg

Renewal of Spirit 27
Howard Lee



BOOKS FOR PULPIT PREACHING

Putting Faith to Work is a distinguished volume of 24 sermons by the pastor of The Riverside Church, Robert J. McCracken. Many themes and emphases — belief, witness, the Church, national and social concerns, personal spiritual problems — by a master craftsman are included in this Christ-centered and forthright collection. (Harper & Brothers, 179 pp., $3)

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God's Word into English by Dewey M. Beegle is a book which will excite and enlighten readers, for here is a vivid and meaningful story of the adventure of Bible translation which explains the nature, variety, significance and purpose of English trans-

(Continued on page 13)

WORTH QUOTING

E. PAUL HOVEY
The Federated Churches
Lewiston, Idaho

Any man who has had one great teacher has more than he deserves.
Gerald Kennedy

° ° °

Those who compare the age in which their lot has fallen with a golden age which exists only in imagination, may talk of degeneracy and decay. But no man who is correctly informed as to the past will be disposed to take a morose or desponding view of the present.
Lord Macaulay

° ° °

Nothing is hopeless that is right.
Susan B. Anthony

° ° °

Comfort is a stealthy thing that enters the house as a guest, and then becomes a host, and then a master.
Kahlil Gibran

° ° °

Our civilization cannot survive materially unless it be redeemed spiritually.
Woodrow Wilson

° ° °

If we have reached the point where physical force has become so great that moral force cannot prevail against the materialistic, then so surely we will have reached the point

(Continued on page 30)

Next month's sermon themes will be "Beneath the Cross" and "To Easter and Beyond."

Pulpit Preaching

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DONALD MACLEOD
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WORDS FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT

THE VISION OF THE PLUMB-LINE

Donald Macleod, Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, New Jersey

Behold, the Lord was standing beside a wall . . . with a plumb line in his hand. And the Lord said to me, "Amos, what do you see?" And I said, "A plumb line." The the Lord said, "Behold, I am setting a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel." Amos 7:7-8

Frank W. Boreham, of Australia, that amiable story-teller of another generation, wrote about a seventeenth century London merchant who was preparing to set out upon a business trip to Scotland. As the coach was ready to pull away from the inn, his old nurse begged him to go to hear three preachers while he was north of the border. When he returned, his friends asked, "Any news from Scotland?" "Yes," replied the merchant, "great and good news. I went to Saint Andrew's where I heard Robert Blair, a sweet and stately man, who showed me the majesty of God. In the evening I heard Samuel Rutherford, a little fair man who showed me the loveliness of Christ. And the next day I listened to David Dickson, a proper man with a long white beard, and he showed me all my heart."

Have any of you ever had an experience similar to this? Here was an English business man, who was rather indifferent to the claims of religion and somewhat annoyed by this obligation to go to church, yet through the witness of these three preachers he was confronted with the majesty of God, the loveliness of Christ, and the sorry condition of his own heart. Have any of you ever known some person whose very presence made everything else different? Someone who, when he entered a room, made the subject of conversation change, and always for the better; who softened every criticism or caused it to be left unsaid; who managed to lift the whole tone and perspective of the crowd? Once I knew a boy at college who, when he joined us at the table, made everything different almost immediately. Sometimes it was merely a word he said or a kind judgment he made, or simply because he was there. Wherever he was or whenever he came, he seemed to show us all our hearts. This is what Colonel Barre meant in his life of William Pitt: "No man ever went into Pitt's presence who did not come out a better man." Or, as Ian MacLaren said about Henry Drummond: "One did not realize how commonplace and colorless other men were until they stood side by side with Drummond."

Our text comes from the stirring message of the prophet Amos who lived in Judah about 750 years before Jesus was born. Out from a rustic, rural background where life was simple, quiet, and good, this awkward peasant came to the City of Bethel where the ways of life were more complex and the relationships among the people were more free. Can you not imagine his horror when he saw how the religion of the people had become weak, insipid, and colorless and at the same time the temples were thronged with worshippers who were apparently going through empty cultic forms to no consequence? Can

you not see him shudder when he found that in the courts of justice there was one law for the rich and another for the poor? Would not his homely trade as a pincher of sycamores compare strangely with the superficial lives of people whom luxury had made fat, indifferent, and lazy? Would not history label him as rash and stupid for criticizing a nation who thought they were especially privileged with God and who pointed to their marvelous prosperity to prove it? Little wonder they shouted at Amos as he denounced them, "Flee to your own land you rough cowherd! Preach there if you like, but do not dare to speak your piece of impudence here!"

And they did silence him. But that was not an end of the matter. Amos was nobody's fool, and away back home among the hills of Tekoa his words were put into writing and his prophetic soul described vision after vision in which God's will and way were to be made known to Israel. And as he stood on that scrubby limestone range, with the towers of Jerusalem breaking the horizon, he saw the hand of God holding a plumb-line beside a wall and his inner consciousness heard a voice saying, "Behold, I am setting a plumb-line in the midst of my people Israel." What a striking picture! How often have we seen a carpenter or stone mason take a cord with a weight attached to it and let it drop from a stationary hook in order to see if a wall be perpendicular and straight. As long as the plumb-line is there, everything that is crooked, oblique, or off-center is exposed.

And this was to be Amos' job in Israel. He must be a prophet, but not in the superficial or magical sense in which we are inclined to understand it; so many people think that a prophet is a peculiar sort of fellow who foretells the future. Prophets, in the proper sense, have always been devout personalities who have taken a long look at the way men live and in times of prosperity and disaster they have declared the character and will of God. Everything the prophet says is by the authority of an extraordinary conviction about who God is and how he expects his own people to live and serve. The prophet walks with God. Moreover, he does not shelter himself in a monastary or cloister but he stands in the cross-currents of everyday events where he sees men loving what is wrong and destroying what is right and he lowers a plumb-line as he says, "Thus saith the Lord!"

Now what has all this got to do with you and me here in the second half of the twentieth century? It has to do tremendously with us because whenever the plumb-line of the integrity of God's character is dropped into our midst either by a person or an event—and these are inseparable—it tests our religion, it explores the quality of our moral nature, and it sets off a revolution among our standards of value. During the fifth century before Christ, a young Greek by the name of Alcibiades, who was sailing through life in a brash and irresponsible manner, became a friend of Socrates, the good and wise philosopher. But sometimes this young man would say to the old sage, "Socrates, I hate you; for every time I meet you, you make me realize what I am!" Look at it this way: Is there anyone in this congregation today who is a plumb-line? In the sorry drift of things, are you as a Christian a plumb-line by which people see what they really are, or what they have made out of their world, or what inwardly they ought to be? I was talking one day to a student from French West Africa who had come to America for the first time and was studying at Princeton, and I asked him what he thought of religion in this country. And his disturbing reply was, "What startles me is that I can see so little difference between those who are Christian and those who are not." Maybe Abbe Michonneau of

France was not unduly pessimistic when he said that modern Christianity "no longer causes any surprise or scandal or admiration or imitation; it has become classified, labeled and forgotten . . . It has become part of the order of things." If this be true, our text is not a far cry from a dead civilization of 2600 years ago; it is a vital word for us in this crucial hour when Christian men and women must hold to the integrity of their religion and demonstrate to the world the redemptive essence of their faith.

I

What disturbed Jesus, just as much as the sin and moral ugliness of men, was what passed for religion in his day. His own people had been exposed for centuries to Jewish teachings and traditions that were hallowed by the name of Moses. In those days, to be religious meant to obey literally thousands of tiny rules and regulations that included even the number of ways in which to wash your hands before a meal. But the end result was not a genuinely religious nation, but a people living undisturbed in their s m u g complacency and thanking God they were not as other men were. As one Pharisee said, "If t h e r e are only two righteous men in the world, I and my son are these two. If there is only one righteous man in the world, I am that one."

But when Jesus appeared he dropped a plumb-line into their midst. He aroused and infuriated them because he compared them to white-washed sepulchres, beautiful on the outside, but filled inside with dead men's bones. And he had the right to challenge them because everything he said was endorsed by the quality of his own life. For him, religion was not what a man did, but basically what a man was. And therefore, the outward form of religion is shaped by the quality of the spiritual reality within. As James S. Stewart put it, "Everything in religion that matters starts from God's side."

There are, however, scores of people today even among our church members, who feel that Christianity is merely a few rules to follow, or that it amounts to being busy with a d o z e n organizations, or that it means being a good fellow within the pattern of the American way of life; or that it is some sentimental nonsense about dropping bits of kindness here and there. Who is ready to become a plumb-line in the realm of religion and insist that Christianity is first and always a vital relationship with God through Christ and that it is only this kind of religion that can inspire and elevate all you say and do? No one becomes a Christian merely by doing good, but you go about doing good as a result of having become a Christian. You are not a Christian simply because you come to church, but whenever you become truly Christian you will be restless unless you are building Christ's church. The Christianity that many profess and practice will never judge the complacent, stir up the indifferent, or attract the anxious unless and until there is at the center of it the throbbing pulse of a spiritual union with Christ. Once a Jewish girl was reading the Gospels and she remarked, "I wonder when Christians began to be so different from Jesus." It is this new sensitivity to the soul of Jesus that we need and the spiritual contagion and magnetism it creates if we are to become a plumb-line in the religion of our day.

II

One of the greatest painters at the beginning of the fifteenth century was the young Italian, Fra Angelico. His friends were disturbed over him because he had no interest in money or worldly honors, but spent his time wandering among the hills, filling his soul with wonder, and meditating with God. And to all their criticisms, Angelico replied, "One must live with Christ if one wants to do Christ's work."

And this points up exactly one of

the sorry features of our world and society today. We expect people to be decent, the newspapers to be filled with good news, human relationships to be happy and nice, without as much as tipping our hats to God. But Paul Scherer has warned us, "Morality has no final meaning apart from God." We've forgotten that, and this is why morals have slipped to such an alarming degree in our day. As the Bishop of Chichester once put it, "The fundamental menace to our civilization is not Communism but a moral nihilism that calls evil good and good evil." We have broken away from our moral moorings and more than one of us acts as if there were no longer any great cleavage between right and wrong. We have tried to run our world by moral slogans that are empty of all religious sanctions: "Business is business" and "Honesty is the best policy." And one politician speaking for the United States said that the policy of America was to translate the principles of the Sermon on the Mount into the life of modern society. What kind of untheological nonsense is that? The Sermon on the Mount is not a code of principles, but consists of examples of how men act when they are born again. And this is just where we come in. Every man who is born again becomes a new conscience that is sensitive to the will and righteousness of God and acts as a plumb-line in the common life of his time. One of the finest tributes ever paid to any man's character was given by a New York layman regarding his own minister, "He has been our conscience." This is what Paul meant when he told the Philippian Christians that "in the midst of a crooked and perverse" generation, they were "to shine as lights in the world."

III

William Temple once said that this modern world reminded him of a large shop window into which some one had crept at night and changed all the labels on the various articles, so that cheap things were highly priced and valuable things were offered for a song. Indeed an editorial in "The Christian Century" a few weeks ago pointed up an excellent contemporary example of this sorry situation to which Dr. Temple referred. It was called "A Twisted Scale of Values" and it referred particularly to a television program during which Elvis Presley, "America's sex idol," did "two wiggles and sang two songs" and was paid the grand fee of $125,-000.00. Then the editorial broke this sum down comparatively by stating that it was more than the yearly salary of the President of the United States; three times the salary of the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court; equal to the income of 25 school teachers, 42 ministers, and to the annual expenses of 125 young people at college; and it could feed 3000 refugee children for one year. And then came this withering sentence: "This reveals the depth of decadence into which our scale of values has sunk."

Now this is not you and I at our best. We have been different and we can be different. We know better and can do better. But this moral muddle of human values will not be cured, however, until more of us become so committed to the will and call of God that even the silent judgment of our presence will show men where they are and what they ought to be. It will demand that we live by the belief that being something is far more important than having something; that security is not found in gadgets but in moral character; that man is not a means to an end but he is made through Christ into a child of God; and that to stand for principle is worth everything in the long run rather than some temporary gain.

And there is a price tag on all of it. It means that you and I must come to terms with the Cross For in the Cross, Jesus set up the plumb-line of the ages and changed forever the standard of values in all our common life. And in view of his tremendous

reversal of all our human values, we can understand why the long line of heroes of the Cross have caught Christ's vision and a Paul goes into Asia, a Carey to India, a Kagawa to the slums of Tokyo, and a Bonhoeffer to a concentration camp. And what they did among such fearful odds, you and I can do tomorrow in the office, the classroom, the kitchen, or the commuter's train. We can begin by making George Matheson's hymn the prayer of our daily life:

O Cross that liftest up my head,
I dare not ask to fly from Thee;
I lay in dust life's glory dead,
And from the ground there
blossoms red
Life that shall endless be.

LEANING A LADDER AGAINST HEAVEN

Clarence J. Forsberg, First Methodist Church, Eugene, Oregon

There are no problems on the contemporary scene that are really original with us. The dimensions for good or evil may be greatly enlarged, but the basic problems are the same. The characters of the Jacob story, for example, had primitive ideas about the world and about God. They did things that would never occur to us to do. And yet there is a bond between them and us, and many times we can recognize ourselves in their story. This is one of the means by which God communicates with man. It behooves us to discover if we can, what God is trying to say to us in our time, from the experiences of someone like Jacob in his time.

You will recall that Jacob had allowed himself to be maneuvered by his mother and by his own ambition into a very clever plot against his father Isaac. He had actually managed to steal the paternal blessing intended for Esau, his brother. When Esau discovered what had happened he vowed to kill Jacob, and he was perfectly capable of carrying out his vow. Physically, Jacob was no match for his brother. Under the circumstances it seemed like the best thing for Jacob was to leave quickly. It was a case of "have birthright, will travel." The pretext for his leaving was that he should go to the land of Haran, from which his mother had originally come, to find a suitable wife. The real reason of course was to escape from his brother.

He traveled all that first day, and when the sun had set, he found himself in a certain place which was known as Luz. Being weary from his travel, he chose a stone from the place as a pillow, and proceeded to go to sleep. As he slept he had a wonderful dream. He saw a ladder reaching up to heaven, with angels ascending and descending. Above the angels and the ladder, he saw the Lord. The Lord spoke to him and said that the very ground upon which he was lying would one day belong to him and to his descendants. The Lord went on to say that his descendants would be as plentiful as the dust of the earth, and that they would fan out to the north and to the south, the east and the west, and through them all the families of the earth would be blest. As if this were not enough for one night's dream, the Lord said further, "Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done that of which I have spoken unto you."

By that time Jacob was wide awake and his first reaction was that of surprise. He had gone to sleep without suspecting that the Lord was in that place, and yet the Lord had appeared to him and spoken of all those wonderful things to come. But as he thought about it, he became frightened by what he had seen. He said, "This is an awesome place; this is

none other than the house of God, and the gate of heaven."

When daylight came, Jacob took the stone upon which he had been sleeping, and set it up as a pillar and an altar to God. He poured sacred oil on top of the stone and named the place Bethel, which means literally the House of God. He was not ungrateful for the dream, and he made a great vow to God who had appeared unto him. Of course, in making the vow he was also driving a few more nails into the bargain between himself and the Almighty. He promised that if God would go with him, and give him clothes to wear and bread to eat, and would safely bring him home again to Isaac's house, then the Lord would be his God and he would surely remember to come back to this place to worship. In addition, he would faithfully give back to God one tenth of everything that God gave him. When he had made that vow he was pleased with himself, and resumed his journey to the land of Haran.

I

The first observation I want to make is that this story is apt to come as a disappointment to those who like the idea of swift justice.

Here was a young man who had just perpetrated a fraud, cheating his father and brother, and even involving God. He was running for dear life, but instead of demonstrating any sign of guilt or anxiety, he simply lies down to pleasant dreams. The least he could have done would have been to show some remorse. You would think that for someone who had done what he did, even the softest pillow would feel like a rock. But ~~as a matter of fact~~, it was the other way: the hardest rock seemed like a pillow. He had no right to be comfortable or to sleep the sleep of the just. But there he is, asleep like an innocent child, without a care in the world.

He reminds me of a man whose wife went to the minister to pour out all her troubles. Her husband was a scoundrel. He spent all his money on wine, women, and song. He did not come home nights and he paid no attention to his family. He was completely irresponsible. The minister tried to be sympathetic. He said "You have my deepest sympathy. Your husband is a miserable sinner." But the wife snapped right back, "A sinner he may be, but he's not miserable." How well that describes Jacob on his first night away from home.

One of the nice things about fiction is that you can always punish the sinners and reward the righteous. The poor little girl who makes flowers for ladies of high society, may freeze to death in the unheated room, but you know that in the last stanza she will wind up playing in bowers of genuine flowers. As long as you can write the plot, no one needs to worry about how the story is going to come out. But real life is not like that. Somehow or other we don't control all the factors, and more often than not it seems as though good people get cheated, and evil men prosper. God seems to be so nearsighted at times. He doesn't recognize his friends, and he doesn't know what His enemies are doing behind his back. It seems incredible to us that a man could steal his family blind, and God turn right around and promise him everything under the sun. He promised Jacob wealth and material possessions, a large and prosperous family, and if that was not enough, assured him that he would be with him no matter where he went or what he did. It is enough to make anyone ask, "Where's the justice of it all?"

Now I do not pretend to know the answer to *this* question that has plagued man from time immemorial. However, there are at least two things to be said to the problem. The first is that while many of us like to keep score on how often the evil are punished and the good rewarded, punishment and reward are not always self-evident. Many years ago a farmer wrote to Horace Greeley, and said,

"Dear Mr. Editor: I want to tell you something. All of my neighbors go to church, and all of them observe Sunday. They won't do anything on Sunday. I plow my fields on Sunday, I sowed my fields on Sunday, and I harvested them on Sunday. Mr. Editor, at the end of the season, at harvest time, I did better than any of my neighbors who observed Sunday and went to church. Mr. Editor, how do you explain that?" Greeley's brief answer was: "God doesn't make up his final account in October."

That was not a bad answer, because it is true that sometimes the joy or the sorrow that we bring upon ourselves and those we love, does not come at the moment, but only becomes apparent after many seasons have passed. This was a lesson that Jacob had yet to learn. But it is not a completely satisfactory answer, because it assumes that sooner or later God is going to visit judgment on anyone who breaks the rules that we keep. It may turn out that God doesn't attach as much significance to some rules that we keep very religiously, while perhaps He judges other things that we treat lightly. I am not trying to defend Jacob. All I am saying is that God is still God, and He is capable of governing His universe without assistance from those who love to make and interpret His rules.

The more I think about it, the more I realize that I have stood in Jacob's shoes. I too have done things of which I should have been heartily ashamed, and the judgment of God did not descend upon me. Instead He has gone on blessing me, and you, with a lavish hand, far beyond our deserving.

II

The second observation I have to make is in the nature of a warning: it is a serious mistake to laugh at a young man's dreams.

The days of youth are a time for leaning ladders against heaven. This was a young man's dream that Jacob had. He was away from home and on his own, presumably with nothing more than he could carry on his back. But his head was full of plans and his heart full of hope, and consequently the future belonged to him.

It has always been that way in our world. The future belongs to the young in heart. It belongs to those who sometimes come empty-handed, but who are capable of dreaming a great future.

Why is it that in politics, in church life, in business and community life, we try so hard to discredit our youth? We want them to be patient, and not to crowd too fast. Back in 1937, according to Giovanni Costigan, "England had greater need than ever of the fierce, unresting energy, the bulldog tenacity, and the scowling defiance of a Churchill—but it was not in that direction that Baldwin looked in his hour of retirement. On attaining his seventieth birthday, at a great youth rally in Albert Hall, he announced his intention of leaving office, and stressed the importance of handing over the torch to youth. The particular youth he had in mind was Neville Chamberlain, who was then sixthy-eight years old."

Young people want to be heard. They do not have the benefit of all of our maturity and experience, but they do have some assets that we may have lost along the way. They have enthusiasm, and they have high hopes and dreams. They have not yet had time to become discouraged by all the "facts of life" that we hide behind when it comes to meeting difficult challenges. If history has anything to teach us, it is surely this: youth will be served. Isaac can go on enjoying that last meal for twenty more years, but Jacob, with an empty stomach and a stone for a pillow, has more important things to do. St. Paul one time wrote to Timothy and said, "Let no man despise your youth!" That was an apt word coming from one who was old in years but young in spirit.

III

The third and final observation I wish to make is that this story is but another affirmation of how God knows better than we do what qualities exist in a man.

In Christopher Fry's play, "The Dark Is Light Enough," one of the characters is complaining to the Countess because she comes to the defense of a seemingly worthless creature named Gettner. Gettner is a despicable coward and opportunist, and he doesn't have much to commend him. Janis says, "It passes my understanding what you imagine you champion in this man." But the Countess is right: life has a hope of him or he would never have lived.

There are so many things that can be charged against Jacob. He is aggressive and brash. He is willing to deceive his own father for a personal advantage. He would even be willing to drive a bargain with God, as long as he stood to gain ninety percent and God ten percent. There isn't much love about him as you see him fleeing from his home. And yet God saw something in him that was worth waiting for.

And perhaps that is the best hope that either you or I have. If we were to be brutally honest with ourselves there isn't much to commend us in the eyes of God. We may have a higher sense of honesty and duty than Jacob did, and we may not go about trying to cheat blind people. But in our own way we too are driven by ambition, and greed, and anxiety, and we have secret sins that we hope none of our neighbors will ever discover. Do we think for a single moment that God does not see them? God does, and yet God must also see something in us worth waiting for, worth loving, worth investing all that He has in order to claim our love and our devotion. Life has a hope of you, or you would never have lived.

RUN, JONAH, RUN

Robert B. Wallace, First Baptist Church, Los Angeles, California

It is a losing race to run from God. If you doubt it, ask Jonah. We can imagine Jonah, sitting in his self-content, suddenly hearing God's call to go to Ninevah. God calls him to go to a group of people whom he hates. Jonah says to himself, How ridiculous is the call of God to speak to my enemies and cause them to receive my blessings. I must run.

Would you listen to our warning, Jonah? No, you are running too fast. The others, who already had tried to escape God, might have told him that it was foolish. They might have told him that God would meet him—maybe in a storm or at the bottom of the ocean, or in a fish's belly. But God is there. You run, Jonah, as fast as you can, but in remorse and repentance, with no other alternative, you will bow down and like a punished child walk back to do what God originally called you to do. But I see, Jonah, that you have got to run it yourself.

Having learned the futility of running from God, when the call came the second time, Jonah went to Ninevah. He walked all the way back to his prophetic task.

To run from God is a losing race. But every day we find ourselves running, panting in order to keep running in an effort to escape God and His call. The call comes to us, not necessarily to go to Ninevah, but the call of God comes to us to love. But instead of doing it, instead of letting love transform every conversation, we escape God by running to self-pity and self-concern.

I

None can define love. We can only illustrate it. We illustrate it as we see a father busy meeting the frustra-

tions of work, but also taking time to show affection to each of his children.

We illustrate it as we see a young man sacrificing resentment toward another and seeking to replace it with a deep interest and affection for him.

God calls men to live out love right where they are. But we are inwardly afraid of the idea. For we know that to love means to become involved. We prefer not to be involved, and thus we put our love upon a few luxury items instead of upon people. We put it upon things that we think we can love, but where we will not get entangled. Each of us has sought to escape God at the point of love. No one can tell you this better than yourself. You know where you have held back the kind of love that commits itself and that would heal human relationships. We do not want to show love to Ninevah, and so we run not to Tarshish but to self-pity or to self-concern.

But we cannot e s c a p e God. As Jonah found God in the belly of a fish, we may also discover that God is p r e s e n t even in our most selfish moments. We may be tied up in our own advancement with all of our thoughts revolving about themselves, with our vision becoming ever more near-sighted. But as our sight is narrowed the more desperate we will feel and the more meaningless life will become until life will be like the walls of the fish's stomach closing us in. Then in desperation we will cry to God for some release. And God will answer. He will be there. To our surprise we will find that we never really escaped Him. He will lead us out, right back to our Ninevah, to the place and to the people where we are to express and live out deep Christian love which commits itself in concern to others.

What a wasted trip! We ran all that way trying to escape God. How much better it would have been if we had realized that we c a n n o t escape God! It would have been better to have accepted that call, no matter how faint, to express love.

II

It is a losing race to try to escape from God. The call of God also comes to us to commit our possessions to Him. But how we love those things, and so we run. We run all the way to the storehouse of things, a retreat called pride of possessions.

Man's favorite retreat from God is into the world of things. We will think we have escaped. But eventually these possessions will begin to bind us in. They give no permanence or meaning to life. Closed in like Jonah in the stomach of a fish, we finally cry to God, I need something more. And strangely enough, He hears, for He is right there, for we had never really escaped. Patiently God walks with us, away from our retreat, all the way back to Ninevah, to the place where we are called upon to present our possessions to God.

We talk about possessions in the church because we seek diligently to make our faith real. There is no reality to faith if it speaks only to the intangible side of life and says nothing about that which occupies about 70 per cent of our time. The reason possessions b e c o m e so important is that in a real sense they are you. Because God would have you, He would have your possessions. God calls each of us to a stewardship, a stewardship that starts with acknowledging that all we have is God's.

What a wasted trip! You thought you had escaped God, but you didn't. For in your moment of selfish hoarding God is still there, waiting until the misery of self-possession will awaken your senses. How much better it would have been never to have run at all and to have committed your possessions to God.

III

It is a losing race to try to escape God. God calls another time, this time He calls saying, You, Christian

Church, I call you to be an evangelist, a missionary. We can accept this as long as the phrase is kept general. But when God starts to talk specifically about increasing our missionary giving, about sending more young people, about reaching out to new people in the neighborhood, about telling somebody else about our faith, then we begin to run. We run all the way to a retreat called self-content, to a place where the Church becomes busy with herself where she thinks she can escape God.

In reality this is not just a call to be evangelists, it is a call to be the Church. For by definition the Church is a confessing community, confessing the truth as we let our voice be heard in public issues, as we let our voice be heard through representatives in various parts of the world, as we let our voice be heard through every member in his home, at his work. It is so easy for us to put on a spectator personality when we go to church, there to receive and to come and go as a spectator. Such a church eventually finds herself like Jonah, surrounded by a great darkness and purposelessness, existing but wondering why. No one can exist in such an atmosphere. Finally the Church falls down in repentance. Strangely enough, God is there. You try to escape there, but He has always been there. Thus we walk back now all the way to Ninevah to the place where we are called to be evangelists.

What a wasted journey to think that we could escape God! How much better it would have been never to have run but to have obeyed the call to be evangelists, anxious to tell the story, the truth about Christ.

IV

When God calls men to be His evangelists, as he is calling each one of us, He is saying many things. Among these He is saying first: This is a call to the individual Christian. This is an end to spectator religion. It is a call to each one of us to feel himself an integral part of the Church by his responsibility both to support his church and to witness for her.

Second, it is a call which is concerned mainly about the present. The mission of the church is not a future task. Either we speak now or we will soon have no tongues to express it. He is saying that the time has destiny. Time is not a vacuum to be filled as we like it. It belongs to God. Now is the time to answer God's call. This also says to us that the Church ought to look at each day with a note of expectancy. God will use this day, and God will use this church. On this note of expectancy God will equip us for our task. Furthermore, God is saying to us by this call to be witnesses, that we identify ourselves with those we would reach. We must identify with the Africa and the Hindu, walk in their shoes, stand where they stand. We must walk with the juvenile delinquent, identify ourselves with the narcotic addict and the alcoholic. Let us identify ourselves with the aimless people living all around us. Then it is that we will know why Christ walked with men and what it means to communicate the Gospel.

Bishop Berggrav of Norway, speaking to the Christian Youth Conference in Oslo, pointed to the ceiling of the cathedral. It was low, heavy, and oppressive. It was like this not by intention, for it was a temporary ceiling as Norwegian artists for eleven years prepared the beautiful ceiling. But the low ceiling was a floor for the workmen. The bishop said that this ceiling is a symbol of the temporary situation of man. The painting of Christ seems to be hidden, but it is there. He added, "When the low ceiling of life in time is taken away, you will get to know that He was there all the time, and that the low ceiling of today was His working floor." We cannot escape God.

BOOKS FOR PULPIT PREACHINGfrom page 2

lations, versions and paraphrases. The book offers valuable insights concerning the men and methods which have made the Book communicable in our tongue. (Harper & Brothers, 178 pp., $3.50)

The Life and Teaching of Jesus by Edward W. Bauman of American University is based on an extended college-accredited TV course. The subject is presented in a persuasive, objective manner in which clarity, persuasiveness, and intelligent judgment are distinguishing hallmarks. This is a splendid introductory volume for students and laymen. (Westminster Press, 240 pp., $3.95)

The Vocabulary of the Church, ed. by Richard C. White, lists more than 10,000 words, presented according to phonetic pronunciation in current American usage. The volume includes those words from the Bible and the church which are most commonly used by pastors and teachers. (The Macmillan Co., 178 pp., $3.50)

Understanding the Sermon on the Mount by Harvey K. McArthur concerns the basic practical, historical and theological problems raised by a thoughtful reading of the Sermon, emphasizing the mind of the Master as well as the meaning and pertinence of the Sermon through the Christian centuries. This stimulating and valuable book will enhance the Sermon's message for both churchmen and laymen. (Harper & Brothers, 192 pp., $3.50)

The Life and Thought of Kierkegaard for Everyman by John A. Gates renders a substantial service to those who have unsuccessfully grasped the man and his message. With discernment and imaginative skill the author has taken the measure of the influential Dane and transmitted, through paraphrase, analysis and quotation, the mind and the heart of his best-known and sometimes neglected writings. (Westminster, 172 pp., $3.75)

The Protestant Faith by George W. Forell is a commendable and readable examination of classical Protestantism that focuses upon the unifying beliefs which are found in a multitude of denominational affiliations and shows the solidarity of common loyalties, purposes and convictions. After defining the nature and spirit of Protestantism and interpreting the fundamental theological convictions which Protestants hold, the author includes the creeds and affirmations of historical significance to an understanding of the faith of Protestants. (Prentice-Hall, 321 pp., $6.60)

Facing Protestant-Roman Catholic Tensions, ed. by Wayne H. Cowan, contains articles by fourteen distinguished Protestants and Catholics designed "to help the concerned reader to identify and understand these tensions and what underlies them, to help him sort out those that are valid from those that are invalid and destructive, and to encourage him to think realistically about them." The ingenious manner in which one author is permitted to comment upon the words of another contributes to a sense of dialogue. The book warrants thoughtful attention. (Association, 125 pp., $2.50)

Fact, Fiction and Faith by James Alfred Martin, Jr., formulates some of the questions and doubts most frequently expressed by those who can make little sense of Christianity as they understand it, but who would like to understand it better. Here are old and new questions which people ask and answers invested with meaningful explorations into the character and purpose of Christianity. This book would make the basis for excellent discussions with youth and lay groups and for sermon series. (Oxford, 186 pp., $3.95)

EDWIN T. DAHLBERG
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LESSONS FOR LENT

THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE FORGIVEN

Edwin T. Dahlberg, Delmar Baptist Church, St. Louis, Missouri

How often we hear someone say, "I can never forgive myself!" It may be that a father going on a vacation trip with his family took a curve at 75 or 80 miles an hour, crashed into a tree, and rose from the scene of wreckage and of death to say piteously, "How can I ever forgive myself!" Or it may be that after a wild night of impulse and sin a penitent soul has said, "If only I could live that night over again in a different way. How can I ever forgive myself for the wrong that I have done to all who loved and trusted me?"

The fact is, of course, that we cannot forgive ourselves. We may try to make such atonement as we can, forget the past, and stoically let bygones be bygones. But we can no more forgive ourselves and thus find healing for our wounded spirits than a man can give himself a blood transfusion by transferring the blood from one of his own arms to the other. For real forgiveness and peace there must be a replenishment of life from outside and beyond ourselves — from no less a source than the love of God himself, as revealed in Jesus Christ. Fortunately the central teaching of the Christian religion is just at this point: that the outpoured love of God as expressed in the death of Christ on the cross is sufficient to cleanse us from our sins when we accept that love. Robert J. McCracken has put it, "This is the diamond pivot point around which the whole record of the Christian gospel revolves." Just as we can pour a bottle of ink into the Mississippi River, and the volume of the river be sufficient to take up the stain; and just as we can open the windows of a garage full of poisonous carbon monoxide gas and the clean winds of heaven be adequate to make the air clean and breathable again; so the love of God in Christ is wide enough and deep enough to sweep out of existence all the guilt and evil that have darkened our souls, so that we become completely new. This is what it means to enter what has been called the "fellowship of the forgiven." This is what it means to join the church. The church is not made up of perfect people. It is made up of forgiven people—people who have been sinners, and in spite of all their best efforts are still sinners, but who confess that they have sinned and have joined the society of the forgiven. This is the happiest company in the world—the fellowship of the forgiven.

There are three states of mind that often prevent people from becoming a part of the fellowship of the forgiven.

I

One is the attitude of mind by which many people say they have no need of forgiveness. How many there are who take the position of the man who says, "I'm as good as the next man. I pay my debts, and try to be a decent citizen. What more can you ask?" Well, Christ asks a great deal more. As Kagawa of Japan said, "It is a very great sin to be average." After all the bloody wars of our generation, and the revelations of vast corruption in every nook and cranny of our society, who can stand at one side with a holier-than-thou attitude and say, "I have had no part in this sin?" A Hindu speaking in my own pulpit some years ago said to the congregation, "There must be some-

thing terribly wrong with your religion, or with your interpretation of it, when we consider the fact that the two most destructive wars of all time were started by supposedly Christian nations." He was right. We have none of us followed Christ as we ought. The first condition of forgiveness is that we should all repent, and honestly admit the truth of what the Apostle Paul said in Romans 3:22-23, "There is no distinction . . . . all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Or as Isaiah put it in the 53rd chapter of his immortal prophecy: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." It is a basically dishonest and idolatrous attitude of mind which leads a man to say, "I have no need of forgiveness." When he says that, he shuts himself out of the community of God's grace, and closes the door into the fellowship of the forgiven.

II

There is a second group of people who adopt just the opposite point of view. Soneone in this company may be so overwhelmed by a sense of guilt and remorse because of his imperfections and moral failures that he says, "I am not good enough to become a Christian. I have sinned so grievously that I am not worthy to receive the forgiveness of God." Such a person should remember that Jesus said to every human being, however burdened with the sense of sin, "He that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." God so loved the world, said Jesus, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not p e r i s h but have eternal life. This promise is for you, and for every man, woman, and child of whatever race, religion, or condition.

Dr. E. Stanley Jones has told a beautiful story in this connection. A man traveling on a train noticed a sixteen year old boy across the aisle who seemed to be in great distress. He would look out of the window, get up and walk up and down the aisle, look anxiously out of the window again, and repeat this process over and over. Finally the man said, "Son, you seem to be worried about something." "It's about my father," said the boy. "We had a violent quarrel a few weeks ago, and he told me to leave home and never come back. My mother has written me that Dad shows signs now of wanting me to come back again. She said for me to look out of the train window as the train goes by our farm, and if Dad is ready to be reconciled she will have a big white rag tied to the branch of the pear tree nearest the track. I can't bear to look. Our place is just around the next bend, and if there is no white rag on the pear tree I am going on by, and will never come back."

The boy's fellow passenger put his hand on the boy's shoulder and said, "Son, sit down and close your eyes. I'll be watching, and I'll tell you what I see." The boy sat down. In a moment the train went around the bend. The man shook the boy vigoroussly by the shoulder and cried, "Look! There's a white rag on every branch of that pear tree!"

So it is in much larger measure with the love of God. He wants us to come home. As Dr. John Baillie of Edinburgh has put it, "When I read my New Testament, every page of it tells me that I am wanted and loved by the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." Why not return today, in the name of the Christ who pledged his very life on the cross that you might not be rejected? There is the white banner of God's forgiveness on every branch of the tree of life whose leaves are for the healing of the nation. Accept that love, become a child of God, and enter into the fellowship of the forgiven.

III

Still a third group of people consists of those who exclude themselves from the fellowship of the forgiven

because they will not extend to others the forgiveness that Christ has so freely given to them. This is the basest of all ingratitude. The Apostle Paul made very clear to us in Colossians 3:13 what the dimensions of our forgiveness should be. "As the Lord has forgiven you," he said, "so you also must forgive."

This is at the very heart of the Lord's Prayer. Jesus said in this prayer which he taught his disciples to pray, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." We cannot expect God to forgive us if we do not forgive those who have wronged us.

My daughter and son-in-law have two nephews, now grown to manhood, who when they were small boys were saying their prayers one evening after having learned the Lord's Prayer in the Sunday School. One of them, not having heard quite correctly the words, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors," said it this way: "Forgive us our debts as we forgive those who are dead against us."

He was essentially right. That is what Jesus meant. We are to forgive those who are dead against us: those who have opposed us, slandered us, betrayed us, and wounded us. In fact, the famous American preacher of the last century, Bishop Phillips Brooks, said in one of his sermons, "The chief business of the Christian is the forgiveness of sins." In obedience to Christ's command, we must so bless them that persecute us and so pray for them that despitefully use us, that we shall even in advance of their repentance create such a climate of outgoing good will and concern that repentance will be made easier, and reconciliation possible. In doing this we are only following Christ's example. It was said of him, "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

World peace, racial integration, industrial good will as between management and labor, and family happiness, too, depend upon this capacity for forgiving those who are dead against us.

I think of two illustrations from the last World War that make clear what we mean by forgiving others as Christ forgave us.

One Sunday afternoon near the close of the war I was to speak at a vester service at Keuka College, on the shores of Lake Keuka in Central New York. I was met at the campus gateway by the president of the campus Y.W.C.A., a lovely American girl, accompanied by three Japanese Nisei girls who were to assist in the the worship service. The whole group greatly impressed me. The next morning we had breakfast with these same girls. Later I said to the college president, "Your Y.W.C.A. president seems to be a wonderful Christian." He replied, "How wonderful a Christian she is I can best describe by telling you that a few weeks ago, when I read her the cablegram that told of the execution of her missionary father and mother by the Japanese in the Philippine Islands, along with nine other missionaries from Japan, she was silent for a moment, and then said, 'Now I know I must give my life in service to the Japanese people.'" The wife of a young American soldier, she went that very summer to a Japanese internment camp in Colorado as a social worker. What greater test of forgiveness could there be than that? As Christ forgave, Betty Covell forgave.

The other example is from the other side of the battle line.

Near the city of Syracuse, New York, out on the shores of Oneida Lake, there lived up to the time of the war, a Japanese Christian family by the name of Iyanaga. Mrs. Iyanaga was a graduate of one of our Baptist colleges, and was a teacher in the community Sunday School. Mr. Iyanaga was the son of a Japanese history teacher in one of our American universities. Husband and wife together operated a little Japanese

souvenir shop.

Neighbors to them were a husband and his wife, who operated a bar near by. They were good friends. But on Christmas morning after Pearl Harbor, the neighbor came in with a gun in each hand. Intoxicated, he had opened the door without warning. Thinking it was a neighborly joke, the Iyanagas said, "What's the idea?" In a drunken fury the neighbor shouted, "I'm going to shoot some dirty Japs!" Immediately he began firing. He shot and killed Mr. Iyanaga, badly wounded the latter's aged mother in the stomach, and wounded Mrs. Iyanaga in the throat. This tragedy left Mrs. Iyanaga a widow with two fatherless boys. The aged old grandmother, a saintly Christian whose Japanese Bible was worn from cover to cover, was so badly injured that to the day of her death she could hardly walk upright.

But the state troopers who came into the home after that scene of sorrow noticed something strange and wonderful about the spirit of Mrs. Iyanaga. How wonderful is explained in what followed. The man who had killed her husband was sent to Mattewan Prison for the criminally insane, while his wife got a job as a hotel waitress in Utica, New York. After it was all over, Mrs. Iyanaga wrote to the waitress in Utica, her old neighbor, "This has all been a terrible mistake. We must not let it stand between us."

Thus did Mrs. Iyanaga on the Japanese side, and Betty Covell on the American side, rise to the heights of the cross and to the level of forgiveness whereby Jesus said, "Father, forgiven them, for they know not what they do." If they could do that, can you not forgive the little spites and hurts and wounds that have entered into your home, into your church and community, perhaps into your heart? "As the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive."

OEDIPUS THE KING AND CHRIST THE LORD

Thomas C. Oden, Phillips University, Enid, Oklahoma

As in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. 1 Cor. 15:22

God is that final reality who meets us in life, whether we like it or not. We do not decide, out of the goodness of our hearts, to allow God a place in the universe. We do not allow him to confront us in the events of life. He confronts us whether we choose it or not. This God, who is everywhere about us and acting graciously on our behalf, works mysteriously even amid our sorrow, despair, and frustration, but perhaps most incredibly in this whole matter of our guilt. We do not need a stack of books on religion to tell us that which burdens each of our hearts, namely, that we are not who we ought to be. We cannot stand before God as pure and spotless creatures and boast to Him of our goodness—and if we can, it is not God before whom we stand.

One purpose of Christian worship is to provide a circumstance in which man can be himself before God; in which, by grace, we can look at who we are, and stand before the Lord with praise and thanksgiving for the great gift he has given in accepting even us. Especially we in the church, who sometimes speak of ourselves as allies and friends of God and yet often live as aliens and strangers to the divine reality, have great need of acknowledging who we are before the Lord. For we, too, are plagued with much of the guilt, hostility, anxiety, idolatry, despair, and every other kind of bondage which men outside the church face.

Let us consider two great dramas which describe our common history, one of guilt and the other of forgiveness. The first is the great drama

of Oedipus the King and the second is the great drama of Christ the Lord. One is a great tragedy in which there is no good news. The second is a tragedy also, the most real tragedy in history, but amid this tragic drama a divine Word is spoken which is the best news ever heard.

In Paul's summary of his first letter to Corinth, he gathers up the whole content of his understanding of the gospel when he says, "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive."

This means all mankind, as symbolized and typified by the man Adam, are bound up and sent into captivity by their guilt and idolatry, and also all men have been made free from their guilt by the divine Word spoken in Jesus Christ, and now are given a new possibility of authentic freedom from self-loathing and self-rejection, and are called to praise God for their existence, and serve and love their neighbors as God has served and loved them.

To Paul Adam was a symbol of the condition of man, and the story of the Garden was a drama of how man got into this predicament. But in the last few generations, the Symbol of Adam has become confused and Adam has been such a stumbling-block to us, with our scientific frame of mind. Many in our day have substituted a new symbol, and a new drama, to describe the condition of man and how he got that way—the story of that glorious and yet desperate King of Thebes who is every one of us, Oedipus Rex. And perhaps the church can respond to the modern frame of mind, by truthfully and faithfully proclaiming the good news that if in Oedipus all men have died, so also in Christ all are made alive!

I

This first drama which tells us so much about ourselves, is Sophocles' "Oedipus Rex," the greatest tragedy of classical Greek drama. Who is this man Oedipus, and what does he point to in us?

The story begins with Oedipus, King of Thebes, who had been clever enough to solve the riddle of the Sphinx and brave enough to lead his people victoriously in battle as he is approaching the altar of the temple of Apollo where many of his subjects are earnestly praying and supplicating. Oedipus asks them why they are doing this. They reply that word has come from the oracle at Delphi that there is a defilement in their land beyond expiation. Upon consulting with the blind old sorcerer Teiresias, Oedipus hears to his amazement the treasonous charge that he is living in an immoral and incestuous love with his mother, and his guilt was the very pollution that could not be washed away.

Then the condemning evidence begins to pile in upon him from strange witnesses of his early life, showing that he had been taken by his mother Jocasta out of the palace where he had been born, to be raised by a shepherd in the hills of Kithairon, and that upon his return as a youth he had murdered a man in a quarrel whom he did not know was his father Laius, and that the Fate had led him —not of his own choice—back to Thebes to answer the riddle of the Sphinx and become King of Thebes, still not knowing who he was, only disastrously to marry his mother Jocasta, who bore him children out of the very womb from which he himself came.

And at the climax, where it becomes undeniably apparent to Oedipus that all this was true, that it had happened this way, and that he had been so tragically deceived by the Fates, he begs a sword from one of his messengers, hurls himself through the twin doors guarding Jocasta's room, only to find her already hanging by a cord which she herself had noosed. Whereupon he took from her dress golden brooches and plunged them into his own eyes,

crying,' 'No more shall you look on the misery about me, the horrors of my own doing!"

And in the last scene, listen to the voice of Oedipus—who is all of us so we are told—as the great central door to the palace is opened and he, blinded, is led in:

God. God.
What has God done to me?
Where shall I find harbor in this world? O God.
The flooding pain of memory
Never to be gouged out.
I am Oedipus, whom the gods hate.
O marriage, marriage,
The act that engendered me, and again the act
Performed by the son in the same bed . . .
Drive me out of this country as quickly as may be
To a place where no human voice can ever greet me,
Since God hates me. God hates me.

And the drama concludes with the chorus chanting:

Men of Thebes: look upon Oedipus.
This is the king who solved the famous riddle
And towered up, most powerful of men.
No mortal eyes but looked on him with envy.
Yet, in the end, ruin swept over him.

This is the basic thread of the myth or drama which some scientists and psychoanalysts tell us best symbolizes the condition of man—guilty before his father, because of his love for his mother, which is the most precious relationship of his father. The Oedipal tragedy is to be unloved by your father whom you very much love, and to stand without a rag of righteousness before his Law because of your miserable sin which you did not really choose, and not to understand why all this has happened; and, worst of all, to realize that the source of the greatest pleasure and security in your life—your mother—is the very cause of your guilt. This is despair to know that we are unlovable because of what we love, and to know that we cannot move toward the goals of our true selves because of our very selves. This is the bondage of the will. This is the condition of man to which the good news of Jesus Christ so graciously speaks.

II

Praise God from whom all blessings flow, we do not now have to be men chained to guilt, unless we choose to disbelieve the promises of God. For the Lord has g i v e n us another drama, the drama of our redemption from guilt. In the drama of the events surrounding the life, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, God our Father has shown us clearly that he loves us in the midst of our alienation. He has spoken to us and dramatized this, not in mere words but in the eventful ministry of a man who laid down his life for us. And in this very hour of worship the church invites you to the riches of God's forgiveness. It is God's free gift to you, believe it or not, without any legal obligations and with no demands except that you accept it as a gift. The good news is that we are forgiven of our defilement which we supposed to be beyond redemption, and we need no longer roam in exile and remorse. The incredible has happened, and been made credible by the drama of the cross, that though we are unlovable we are yet loved.

Without this drama, this symbol and event upon which we hang our hopes, we could never have understood, grasped, trusted, and known what it means to be a son loved by our Father. This is the divine Word which we celebrate in the service of Holy Communion. In the elements we re-enact, recite, and re-present in action the drama of God's gift to us.

This is the drama which signifies

God's attitude toward us; God's reaching for us, his becoming a servant on our behalf, and we in the church talk so much about this drama and yet trust in it so little. We need not so much to be re-told this story as to accept it and recognize it for what it is, the drama of our redemption. The church unapologetically invites you to receive this message as the good news of our deliverance.

The burden of our witnessing need not be to say a million different things each in a sparkling way, but to say only this one thing, and say it in a million different ways. The church speaks a simple word to the world: God is for us, Immanuel! This whole drama can be told even in very unsophisticated one-syllable words: that God has shown his love for us in that while we were yet dead in our sins Christ died for us.

But what a hindrance it is for us to begin to try walking in faith if we still feel that we in some way merit this gift of forgiveness or that our goodness has earned it. When we face God we do not face Him as men who can boast of our good deeds like Boy Scouts getting merit badges, but merely as men of faith or unfaith, casting our lot with or against the truthfulness of his promises.

The gospel is not for the morrow, but for the moment. It is not for some situation, but for this situation. It is here love, now love, here praise, now praise, here live, now live. Our awareness of our forgiveness and the act of divine reconciliation must become as incessant and near to us as the act of breathing. Our great sin is forgetting, not remembering that this drama has come to pass.

No casual academic game is what God has done for us. Never should a moment go by unpraising.

Man stands forever at the Gate
of Thebes,
His gouged eyes unable to see
but exile,
His guilt and anger dragging
his heart,
His memory sobbing the yes
that he knows:
God hates me,
God hates me,
God hates me,
God hates me.
While ever on the skull-hill
above fair Thebes,
Lies God pinned ugliest of all
to hell;
His prophets are shouting from
gate to gate
That yes which memory can-
not call:
God loves me,
God loves me,
God loves me,
God loves me.

GOD'S USE OF MAN'S WEAKNESS

Henry Pope Mobley, Jr., Highland Presbyterian Church, Louisville, Kentucky

Scriptures: Judges 16:18-20; Ephesians 1:15-23

Harris E. Kirk says that the Christian faith made the rapid inroads into the thinking and the lives of people in the early years because it provided men and women what they were looking for.

Jesus was born to a very religious age; practically everyone was interested in religion. It was an age not unlike our own in that respect. But the religions of the time were not entirely satisfactory for all who sought. Men talked about religion, they tried many religious ideas, but they were not satisfied. What they needed was not religious ideas and theories and discussions, but the power to live in their troubled times, the power to make sense out of life.

Into this atmosphere the Christians came with a simple story of the power of God that had come into the

life of man. The story could be told in a few words: Jesus of Nazareth was born the Son of God, he lived and taught and displayed the power of God, he was crucified, buried, but on the third day he was resurrected from the dead and still lived in the lives of those who believed in Him.

This simple story supplied what the people of that day wanted and needed. They had in this story not conversation about religion, but something that happened. They had a helper and a guide; they had a purpose in living, a goal for life; they had some power greater than their own upon which they might depend.

What was true in the earliest days of the Christian era is true in the twentieth century of that era. Our faith is not one of ideas only; it is not simply a faith of morals; it is a faith that believes that God's power is made available to man to help him live and to put meaning into his life. God's p o w e r can take man's weakness and turn it into strength.

I

We must begin with a promise. If we cannot accept this promise, then the rest of this has little validity; so you must decide first whether you can accept this statement of belief about our relationship to the Creator. The promise may be stated in the words of the Apostle, "You have been given power to become the sons of God."

It is our faith—and this is taught throughout the Bible — that God's strength and power are available to man. Not only available, we believe that God wants to lend his strength and power to any who willingly accept what he has to offer. As we read about the experience of men of faith in the scriptures, a portrait unfolds of the Lord waiting patiently for man to call upon Him for guidance and help.

The power that God offers comes to man through the process of faith and trust. It is not like getting a loan at a bank, but it is a gift freely given without carrying charges or interest, and it need not be repaid.

We believe that God has not remained remote from the affairs of men, but has come the stream of daily life. We see his hand in history. The Hebrew people felt that He led them, chose them, protected them, and abandoned them only after the people themselves decided that they no longer needed his power. He revealed Himself personally in the form of Jesus of Nazareth. He still lives and moves in the affairs of men when they are willing to have his help.

Am I making the promise clear? We believe that God will walk the streets of the modern city with man, will give man the strength for his trials, the wisdom for his decisions, a map for his direction in life. We believe that until man knows God's relationship to him, he lacks the sense of purpose which makes life meaningful.

To make this clearer still, we believe that the basis of our faith is not a set of theories or ideas or beliefs or teachings; the basis of our faith is a Person who is concerned with us as individuals, and who will be our partner in the art of living.

If we can accept this promise, the rest of what I have to say follows as the logical conclusion. If we cannot accept the promise, then the rest of this has little meaning.

II

The second point is that God in his working in and through the affairs of man has always used the best that was available to Him.

Sometimes the best is none too good. If you are acquainted with the Book of Judges you will remember that during the period when the people of Israel were conquering and occupying the Promised Land, they were a divided people with little leadership. Whenever a crisis arose some leader, men like Gideon, Jephthah, Ehud, and others, would be called forth to settle the difficulty. They possessed a certain amount of talent and strength and were natural lead-

ers upon whom others leaned. But by any standards they were a weak lot and not very moral.

What intrigues the reader of the Book of Judges is that God was willing to use such men for his purposes. Samson, for example, was called by God to leadership; but why did God choose Samson? He had great strength, but he had very little else to commend him. His morals shocked even the people of his own day; he was brutal, arrogant, treated his parents shamefully, and was utterly stupid. We read the story as a horrible example rather than as a scripture lesson for our inspiration.

The reason God used such a man as Samson is that He had no one else to choose. God used the best that was available to Him at the time. God has always done that, and He always will do that, because God will not manufacture great men for his purposes. God chooses what is available and transforms even the weakness of the men so chosen into the necessary strength for His uses.

You will recall that the children of Israel spent 400 years as slaves until God found a man who was capable of the task of leading them toward freedom, and of setting up the religion which he desired for his people.

When Samuel was born, and dedicated to the Lord by his mother, only then did God lead the people toward unity of government and worship, and He did it through Samuel, but only when such a man was available to Him.

We believe that God still can use men for his purposes and that he still desires leaders for his people, but He uses what is available. He does not try to create great leaders for the times.

At the same time we s h o u l d recognize that God can take even the weakness of man and use it for His good works. The dedication of even a little man can produce big results. We have only to consider those men whom Jesus chose as his disciples to prove the point. Of the twelve there were only two who had outstanding attributes, and yet God took their dedication to His will and began to expand it and magnify it, until the results exceeded their greatest expectations.

God uses what is available, but he also magnifies that which is available in an unbelievably wonderful way.

III

The third point is that God uses as much of ourselves as we are willing to surrender to His use.

Samson made his strength available for use against the enemies of Israel, and God used that much of Samson for his purposes. Samson never was willing to give his mind and heart, but God used as much as Samson gave, and enlarged the strength to unbelievable proportions.

One day I was called to a hospital when a three-year old boy was taken seriously ill. The family sat anxiously in the waiting room talking in a worried and subdued tone, but the grandfather was over in the corner by himself in tears and prayer. I knew the grandfather well; he was a fine, moral man, but not what one would call overly religious. Here he was, however, in what was the worst crisis of his life in tears and prayer.

Later he told me in a wondrous way what had happened to him. "I never had prayed so hard before, and all of a sudden I knew that the boy would be well. A great sense of comfort and peace came into my soul. Nothing like that had ever happened to me; I knew God was right there." He was astonished at this flowing of power into his consciousness.

The experience has undoubtedly made him a better man, but the reason for what happened is easily explained. For the first time in his life he was called upon to give himself over for a moment at least to the mercy of God, and God seized that moment to use what the man so willingly gave. God uses as much as

we are able to give to His use; the more we are able to give, the more He can use.

When we come to the experience of a man like Paul the Apostle, who was able to give all of himself all of the time, then there is no end to the greatness of the result. For God takes man's weakness and uses it, and enlarges the strength available to Him into a massive force.

We see people all the time who are bitter at life, who can find no meaning to life, and who feel worthless and weak. Indeed we have felt that way ourselves, wondering at the purpose of it all and wondering how we can ever come out of our troubles and fears. But when we feel that way it means that we have been unable to give any of ourselves into the hands of God, because if the promise is true —and there is no doubt about it so far as I am concerned—when we surrender any of ourselves to his care, he takes that much of us and turns it into strength and purpose and provides us that much relief, at least.

And if, as we grow, we are able to give more of ourselves to him, then He uses that, too.

For a period of almost a year and a half during the War, I was stationed at the nerve center of the radar network which stretched a l o n g the Pacific Coast. For about a year of that time I was the only officer living on the base, and each night I found companionship in the company of the various officers who had to serve from time to time as Officer of the Day. Since the officer thus assigned needed a very few minutes to make his rounds, we found many hours for conversation, and invariably the talk turned to religion. We discussed theology, religious ideas, the merits of other religious systems, personal religious experience, and other related topics. All seemed interested, but I am not sure the discussions did any good except to sharpen my wits in debate, and to while away the long night hours. I did not realize fully then just what these men were looking for, indeed what all of us are looking for. Discussions about religion are interesting and entertaining, but what we need and what we are looking for is power to find our way and power to assure us a safe conduct in our journey.

The Apostle realized that his age and every age needs that: "Jesus Christ is the power of God unto salvation," he wrote, and men responded and the faith in Jesus Christ spread like a grass fire across Europe.

We tend to forget this. We like to discuss and argue our theories of religion, and oftentimes we make reasonable arguments the basis of religion; but what shook the world is the fact that God made his power manifest in history. No faith can satisfy the deep yearning of the heart that does not help men and women live, that does not afford strength to walk the streets and accomplish the tasks of the day. We are given the "immeasurable greatness of his power" in Christ. We can face the serious illness and dangerous operation not with the attitude of stoicism—as admirable as that may be—but with the knowledge that God is with us and will watch over us.

We make our decisions, we face our crises, we tackle our problems not with the resigned hope that all will eventually turn out for the best, but with the sure knowledge that God—when we trust Him—will make all things turn to good for them who love him.

We are confronted with the failures of our weakness, the despairs of our inadequacies, the terror of our anxieties until we know that God has come to us in the person of his Son; that He came for all time and for all men and for all ages; that He can use even the weakness of men for his great purposes.

We are not like those who wander aimlessly without direction and purpose. We have a guide, a teacher, a strong right arm, a companion for our way.

THE NEW LOOK

Ben F. Lehmberg, First Methodist Church, Colorado Springs, Colorado

One of the most fascinating presentations of the nativity story, in the world of fiction and poetry, is found in John Masefield's dramatic poem called "The Coming of Christ." Four angels are pictured attempting to persuade the Christ not to take the form of man and go down to earth. The four angels are the Light, the Power, the Mercy, and the Sword.

In their attempt to dissuade Him, the angels use all sorts of arguments. They tell Him that He would have to endure much suffering if He took the form of a man. They remind Him of the temptations on earth. They tell Him that He will be rejected by the people. They foresee all the trouble, sorrow, and suffering that will come to Him if He goes to earth.

Christ answers the four angels by saying that He believes His coming to earth might lighten a way for man to find God. Then he adds:

> So be it then.
> But the attempt being worthy,
> should be made.
> Having beheld man's misery,
> sin and death,
> Not to go were treason . . .
> I lay aside my glory and my
> power
> To take up Manhood . . .
> Though Hell itself assail: God
> will protect.
> O brother Man, I come; hate
> me not always.

He came! His coming caused time to start all over again. Of course, there were those who had preconceived conceptions of the Messiah and were disappointed when Jesus did not live up to their views. John the Baptist was one who had some serious questions. We read, "Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, 'Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?'" (Matt. 11:2-3). John had given his life to proclaim the Messiah's coming. Now he was in prison, and in the midst of discouragement and loneliness, he wanted to be reassured. "Are you the one?" he was asking.

Jesus was not disturbed by John's question. The records indicate He was quite patient with the forerunner. His answer was simply, "Go and tell John what you hear and see." In other words, "Tell John just to look around. Am I not bringing a new look into the world? Observe and your questions will be answered."

Jesus came to bring a new look. He changed the whole course of history.

Today there are more than a half billion professing Christians in the world. They are to be found everywhere in the world. They are not limited to one type, or one race, or one class. These Christians are to be found on every continent. They are found among every race of people. They are found in every type of culture.

How do you account for more than 500 million people in the world today turning to Christianity? The answer is simple. Because Jesus Christ came to offer something nobody else can offer. He came to bring the new look.

I

Jesus came to bring man a new look at man himself.

Who are you? A shell-shocked veteran walked into an American Legion Convention, stumbled up to the platform, and interrupted the meeting as he cried out in a loud voice, "Can anybody tell me who I am?"

Who are you? In "No Trumpet Before Him," a novel about a Methodist minister, Jeanie, the cynical daughter of the bishop, says to a friend: "Well, I've grown up. I don't believe in the human race, or anything else. I don't

see anything anywhere that leads me to think mankind is getting better or even wants to get better." She did not think man counted for much.

A great many cynics would agree with this bishop's daughter. A minister recently wrote to the editor of "The Christian Century": "Sirs: Your Philippine correspondent relates the fact that an average of 500 monkeys a month are being sent to England or America for medical research, particularly for use in the manufacture of Salk vaccine. What a price the animal kingdom is made to pay to preserve the lives of humans, so that they may plot the heartless slaughter of countless millions of their own kind. Are we worth a single monkey's life?"

Another cynic says that man is "a small but boisterous bit of the organic scum that for the time being coats part of the surface of one small planet."

There are those who would not go to the extremes of the cynic, yet they would not lift man any higher than the animal kingdom. Someone says, "Man is an animal that bargains. No other animal does that. No dog ever trades his bone to another dog." This person sees man as the highest form of animal life, but still as an animal. Another says, "Man cooks his food. No other animal cooks his food before eating it." But is that saying enough about man?

Jesus had other ideas about man. That is pretty well related for us in the most familiar verse in the entire Bible, John 3:16: "God so loved the world He gave His only begotten son." As a result of Jesus' coming into the world, man came to be defined as "God's offspring." You are a child of God—God's offspring. That's the new look of man Jesus brought.

In Eugene O'Neill's play, "The Great God Brown," the central figure, Brown, lies dead on the street. A policeman bends over his body and asks: "What's his name?" Someone replies: "Man." The policeman takes out his notebook and pencil and says, "How do you spell it?" Do you spell it "chemical accident"? Or do you spell it as the New Testament does, "Now are we the Sons of God and it doth not yet appear what we shall be"? It is this latter spelling which keeps faith with the teachings of Christianity.

Who are you? Jesus said, "You are somebody worth dying for" and He died for man. Just take a look at the cross. I wish I could present to you a picture of the cross you would never forget—Jesus, the Christ on the cross, revealing the unfailing, matchless love of God for mankind. Does that mean anything to you?

There used to be a cross on a Presbyterian Church in Los Angeles—a large, ugly, wooden cross. There was a sign at the foot of the cross with this question: "Is it nothing to you, all ye who pass by?" I am asking you now if the cross means anything to you—anything at all? Not only does it say worlds about God, but it also tells us worlds about man. God thought man was worth dying for. Jesus came to bring to man a new look at himself.

II

Jesus came to bring to man a new look at God.

Jesus called God Father. In no other religion is God thought of as "Father." In Mohammedanism God is creator, but He is never Father. Jesus spoke of God as a Father who forgives. In Buddhism God is a Mind, but he never forgives. Jesus spoke of God as being very near and watching over the birds of the air and the flowers of the field. How much more He will care for us, His children! In Hinduism God is reality, but He never comes to dwell with His children. All religions have their prophets. Only Christianity has a Saviour. This Saviour came to give a new look at God, the Father, the Friend, the Forgiving God, an ever present God, One who seeks and saves.

What a beautiful new look at God

He has given to us. Do you have trouble? Jesus reminds us that God shares His strength with us in our troubles. Hear His invitation: "Come unto me, all ye who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." And again: "My peace I give unto you. Not as the world giveth, give I unto you; let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

Someone asked a kindly old minister what the most comforting text in all the Bible was. He replied: "It came to pass." A friend spoke up and said: "But, Joe, that's not a Bible verse. That's only the beginning of one." To which the old minister replied: "You are wrong. Those are the most comforting words in the Bible to me. When you have trouble or any other thing is wrong, it doesn't come to stay. It comes to pass." God is a very present help in time of trouble; He offers His strength and help while the trouble passes.

Do you have sorrow? God takes the sorrow upon Himself. In old China, when a child died, the members of the family and friends would do all sorts of things to prevent the evil spirits from stealing the soul of the child. One of our missionaries, who saw this kind of practice when she first went to China, said: "The saddest sound in China was the sound of a mother in the night, with her pans and cries, out in the yard, trying to frighten away the evil spirits." How different it is under the Christian system. When a little child is taken in death in a Christian community, sorrowing friends join the sorrowing family and they are reminded of God's loving presence. They know that God will take care of the little one in His loving presence.

Little Mary called on a friend who had lost her mother. Later, when Mary's father asked her what she said to her little friend, she replied: "I didn't say anything. I just put my arms around her and held her close." She expressed the highest type of sympathy. When sorrow comes, we are reminded that underneath are the Everlasting Arms.

Do you have problems about family, or friends, or business, or health, or human relations? The Christian knows he can count on God the Father. He realizes God does not send failure, hardships, and accidents to get even with His children. God does not torture His children. Instead, He is a healing God, a helping God.

Jesus came to bring to man a new look at God. It is tragic that many so-called Christians still do not have this Christian conception of God.

III

Jesus also came to bring to man a new look at the world. To Jesus, the world was the creation of a purposeful God. And God had his plans for it. He's in charge of it. He has not turned it over to some devil or demon to control it until He is ready to take it over again. "This is my Father's world," said the writer of the hymn. He was expressing what Jesus taught about this world.

What a marvelous world it is. Every day man is discovering something new about this marvelous world, and it increases our amazement concerning the majesty of God.

In giving us a new look Jesus asked for the cooperation of man in building God's kind of a world. Listen to Him as He reminds us what we ought to be doing to make this His kind of world: "Ye are the light of the world," He says to His disciples. "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." At least seventy-six times in the Gospel according to John did Jesus make some reference to the world. There is much about it that is wrong, but it is God's creation and we are to cooperate with Him in making it His kind of a world.

IV

Jesus came to bring a new look at how to live. From the beginning it was recognized that Christians lived

differently from other folk. We read in the fourth chapter of the book of Acts, in connection with Peter and John, that the people looked upon these disciples, marvelled, and recognized "that they had been with Jesus." You see, they did what Jesus said all His disciples should do — let their lights so shine that others could see their good works and glorify their Father in heaven. As Kagawa, the great Japanese Christian, put it: "To imitate Jesus and follow in His footsteps—that is Christianity."

A seeker after truth went to Pascal and said, "I wish I had your creed; then I could live your life." I like the answer of Pascal. He replied, "Live my life and you will soon have my creed."

Creeds are important. Theology is important. But if I understand the teachings of Jesus at all, our Christ expects us to move beyond theological discussions to a life. All the creeds in the world, no matter how perfect, are meaningless unless they produce better lives. Jesus was engaged in the business of producing lives that resemble His. "Be ye perfect," He said, "as my Father in heaven is perfect."

A Christian will not be content just to hear the word of God. He will live it.

A great violinist liked his practical jokes, as most of us do. One day he was staying in a small hotel in a little town. He saw a shop with a sign across the doorway. "Violins bought and sold here," it read. He decided to take his expensive violin into the shop and ask the shopkeeper how much he thought it was worth. The man in the shop turned the violin over and over, examining it carefully. Then he looked up at the master and said: "Where did you get this instrument? It is one of the most expensive violins in the world. In fact, I know to whom it belongs—the master." The great violinist realized he had been found out. He smiled and said, "You are right. In fact, I am the master. I am visiting in your city." The shopkeeper was not convinced. "How do I know you are the master?" he asked. The master said he would show him his card. The shopkeeper said that would not convince him. Then he had an idea. He went to his records and picked out a record of the great violinist and put it on a record player. Then he said: "You play the sonata on your violin; when you have played it, we will then turn on this player and hear how the master played it." The great violinist smiled and lifted the bow to the violin and filled the shop with magnificent music. The shopkeeper turned on the record and played it. There was no question but that the man in the shop was the master.

Are you a Christian? You say, "I believe this and I believe that." That does not convince the world. It does not even convince our Christ. He says, "By their fruits ye shall know them." He came to bring a new look to our living.

RENEWAL OF SPIRIT

Howard Lee, Flagler Memorial Church, St. Augustine, Florida

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Psalm 51:10

Do you sometimes find you have no spirit for anything? Your disappointments are so deep and your failures are so devastating that you just don't have the heart to go on. I suppose that kind of feeling comes to us each at one time or another. But it doesn't need to stay. We don't have to spend our whole lives in gloom. As the old proverb puts it, "You are not to blame if crows light on your head, but it is your fault if

they build a nest in your hair." Times of barrenness of spirit may come, but we need not spend our lives in that mood. God's Word shows us the way of renewal of spirit.

Let us look at the experience of David, for it gives us one of the examples in Scripture for renewing our spirits. Look at the Psalm 51, one of the great prayers of Scripture. It begins: "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness: according to the multitude of thy tender mercies, blot out my transgressions." The climax of the Psalm is that great verse, which is a prayer in itself: "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me."

I

To begin with let us notice that David knew where to take his troubles. This is what made David "a man after God's own heart." He was not morally better than other men. Indeed you remember this prayer seems to have come as a result of a moral fall. He went down before the common temptations of the flesh. Then, to cover up his guilt of adultery, David became involved in intrigue and murder. Then the prophet Nathan showed David the awfulness of his crime. David saw his sin as it must appear before God and he went straight to God first with his confession of guilt and then humbly to plead for forgiveness and renewal. Was this "a man after God's own heart"? Not if that means sinlessness and moral perfection. But, if to be a "man after God's own heart" means acknowledging God's presence and authority; if it means real communion with God; if it means bringing failure, sin, and shame to Him as to a father that pitieth his children, knowing that so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him, then indeed David was a man after God's own heart. So we see him here after his grievous sin, his heart burdened with guilt, his spirit crushed with disappointment in himself, coming before the Lord, not to ask that He save his reputation, but making a clean breast of it all, owning his wrong-doing, and throwing himself on the mercy of God, he pleads for His forgiveness and restoration. That is the subject of the Psalm 51 and of the prayer that is our text: "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."

Are you wondering if I am saying that "the dark nights of the soul," the days of the barren spirit are due to our sins only? For you would probably say defensively that you have no overwhelming sense of guilt that causes the oppressive burden of spirit of which we've been talking. I would answer that I do not think all of our dullness of spirit comes from our sin and guilt. But I do believe more of it comes from this cause than most of us are aware of or are willing to confess. To be sure, we all know the difference between right and wrong (to greater or less degree) but that doesn't guarantee that we are always going to do the right. David, too, knew right from wrong, but sometimes he did wrongly even so. Like Paul, we surely know the experience, "The good that I would, I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do." In our more sensitive moments we would admit that we are like that London woman whom Muriel Lester tells about, who said, "I'm as good a woman as God ever made, but I just can't live up to it." So, I believe that the spirit that is out of tune is usually out of tune with God, and therefore we all need to find that way of renewing the spirit within us that David's experience shows; the way of careful self-study, the way of open confession of all failures and false steps directly to God our Father, and with His help avoid repetition of our mistakes. "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me."

II

The goal of every good life is a clean heart and a right spirit. Neither is easy to come by. And for that

reason many are tempted to give up and quit. Over and over we try and fail, until we wonder if it is even possible to win a clean heart and a right spirit. But David asked God the Creator of all good to re-make his inner life, his thoughts, his intentions, and his impulses. David knew, as Jeremiah later proclaimed, that "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." And so he knew he had a task too great for himself alone. But man's Creator can surely re-make even the sinful heart, and so he implores God to create in him a clean heart that would not only know the right but will and do that right.

David Livingstone, the great pioneer missionary to Africa, related that an African Chief said to him: "I wish you would change my heart. Give me medicine to change it, for it is proud, proud and angry, angry always." Livingstone lifted a copy of the New Testament and pointed to it and was about to tell the man of the only way the heart can be changed, but the chief interrupted him saying, "No, I will have it changed by medicine to drink, and changed at once." Of course, we all want that easy magical way of changing the heart. If vitamins or antibiotics would do it, we would take the medicine at once. But the clean heart can come only by that redeeming relationship that God offers us through prayer and obedience.

The Bible tells us that though our sins "be as crimson they shall be white as snow." Dr. R. A. Torrey, a noted American evangelist of another day, went to preach in the university center of Oxford in England. The late William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury, was then a don of Queen's College. He related to his students that he had gone to hear Torrey preach and that the evangelist had told the audience that "in the dead and dark of night his sins marched past him in a scarlet procession." But, said Temple, "I never saw my sins that way; mine are gray, all gray." Perhaps you see your sins in the same way. Not scarlet or crimson as the Bible says, but gray—a mixture of black and white, partly good, only partly bad.

I sometimes hear sincere Christians say something like this: "It's impossible to live strictly according to Jesus' teachings in the world today. If we are to make a living, raise our families, and achieve anything like success in our business and profession, then we have to make compromises (maybe not serious ones, but compromises) all along the line." That's the gray sin we are all involved in in this present world. But that dull gray may be what is wrong with heart and spirit in us. "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life." "Create in me a clean heart, O God."

III

"Renew a right spirit within me." Often the spirit within us is out of tune with God because communication between our soul and the Spirit of God has broken down. The damaging effects of sin (scarlet or gray) aside, I daresay that for most people the barren spirit c o m e s from just wandering away from God. Perhaps no hideous sin like David's has been committed, no crime or serious wrongdoing; still we feel the need for a new, right spirit within. Check up on yourself and you may find that you are no longer talking to God as once you did, and what may be even worse, you are not taking any time to let him talk to you; his word and truth cannot reach you.

In his novel, "No Down Payment," John McPartland relates this experience of Herman Kreitzer, a salesman. "Sunday morning finds him in the garage wiping off the car; it's his day to tinker around. His wife Betty and their two children are ready to start for church. Betty calls to her husband, Herman, why don't you come to church with us today? Sandra and Harmon bobbed their heads up to look at him. His answer will be

important to them. Every Sunday they went to the Lutheran Sunday School. Every day they began the day with prayers Betty had taught them, they said grace before each meal, and they ended the day with their going-to-sleep prayers. He thought it was a fine thing for kids, the right way to bring them up. But not for him. Somewhere along the line he'd lost it, and he wasn't quite sure how or why, only he was too honest with himself to sit in the pews of the church, singing the old hymns from the Lutheran Hymnal, listening to the earnest young man who was the pastor give his sermon. He couldn't do it anymore . . . The church people meant well. He respected them for believing the things they did. He never had argued with Betty about religion or going to church. Funny, during the army years he'd believed in all of it, and he had carried his Bible from the induction center to basic, from POE to the long b a t t l e s of the European Theatre of Operations . . . Now he had lost that faith he had cherished so in those days. Maybe it was because he was interested in science . . . God—certainly God, but the understanding of that inconceivable God could not come from an earnest young man in a small church in Redwood City. And still, he looked at Betty, at his children waiting for his answer; he felt that he had lost something and that he had not found something better to replace that which was lost."

Now, let us look back over the subject we've thought on. We have seen that listless spirit, the burdened spirit, the spirit out-of-tune, may be caused principally from two things: sin in our hearts that has gone unforgiven or from our careless wandering away from God. In these things the great prayer of David in the Psalm 51 points the way for us. Let us be h o n e s t with ourselves and honest with God; let us study ourselves carefully, and where we have failed or fallen short, let us go directly to God our Father and confess our faults and seek his forgiveness, as David did. Where fellowship with God has been broken either by wrongdoing or by neglect, this prayer can restore it: "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." Thus you can know again the "joy of salvation" and be upheld by God's free spirit.

WORTH QUOTING from page 2

where man is bent upon self-destruction.

Margaret Chase Smith

* * *

Interest in reform, like interest in religion, can flourish, but things will grow worse instead of better until we straighten our spines and go into courageous action.

Emma Kidd Hulburt

* * *

The delinquency problem is not so much an improper youth as an improper home.

J. Edgar Hoover

* * *

May the door open in to family love and trust. May the door open out to a world of opportunity for service and growth.

Lucy Adams

* * *

Religion does give peace of mind; it does provide better relationships; it does mean healthy minds in healthy bodies. But religion is not a means to anything other than the presence of God. We should seek God, not for what we can get out of Him, but for what He can get into us.

Gaston Foote

* * *

The world is a series of funeral processions — not only of deceased comrades, but also of dead hopes, abandoned ideals, spurned loves, betrayed friends, gnawing frustrations, ingrowing selfishness, and fear of the future. And there is but one place

to turn. Behold the cross!

Chester Warren Quimby

* * *

I've never met a healthy person who worried much about his health, or a good person who worried about his soul.

John B. S. Haldane

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It is not a good spiritual policy for us . . . to thank God only for the material progress of our times; because these material things will soon give place to something better, and then our prayers and hymns will seem lost, and we who lived for them will seem to perish with them; but if we bless God for the sun that has held us in its arms, and for the autumns that have painted the fields . . . then have we a worship which the future cannot take away from our souls or memories.

David Swing

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where man is bent upon self-destruction.

Margaret Chase Smith

The mark of the immature man is that he wants to die nobly for a cause, while the mark of a mature man is that he wants to live humbly for one.

Wilhelm Stekel

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Age seems to me only another physical handicap, and it excites no dread in me—I who have lived so long and so triumphantly with many limitations.

Once I had a dear friend of 80 who impressed upon me the fact that he enjoyed life more at 80 than he had at 20. He used to say to me, "Never count how many years you have, but how many interests you have. Do not stale up your days by taking for granted the people around you, or the things which make up your environment, and you will ever abide in a realm of fadeless beauty and youth and life."

Then and there I resolved, vestal-like, to cherish an inextinguishable flame of youth. I have tried to avoid ruts—doing things just because my ancestors did them before me, leaning on the crutches of vicarious opinion, losing my childhood sense of wonderment. I am glad I still have a vivid sense of delight in new things and a vivid curiosity about the world I live in.

Age, I suppose, like blindness, is an individual experience. Everybody discovers its roseate mountain peaks, or its gloomy depths, according to his or her temperament. It is as natural for me, certainly, to believe that the richest harvest of happiness comes with old age, as that true sight and hearing are within, not without. Confidently I climb the broad stairway that love and faith have built to heights where I shall "attain to a boundless reach of sky."

Helen Keller

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In the solitude of his room that lonely night, 12-year-old Dale Sander sat at his desk lost in meditation. Soon, he knew, he must undergo delicate surgery to correct a serious heart ailment. Slowly he removed a page from his school notebook and began to write: "If I die my things, as listed below, will be given to the people and places marked below. My globe—Laura Kay Sander; My coin collection—my dad Harvey . . . my model race car—my mother Carol; my money—my church; . . . my little toys—Ruth; . . . my money in Minneapolis $5—my Sunday school class; . . . my wagon—Ruth." . . . Dale's will was a simple document lacking legal polish and rhetorical perfection. But as a sincere, eloquent testament of love for family and friends, and as a recognition of obligation to one's church, it has few equals.

"A Boys' Will" in
Together

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Living it up is a quick way to build a reputation that you may be long in living down.

Burton Hills

There are enough Christian hostesses today to make cocktail serving a social error if they would exert their might.

R. E. Dudley

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If we can first know where we are, and whither we are tending, we could better judge what to do and how to do it.

Abraham Lincoln

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Happiness—it seems to go with very old age. Almost all these wonderful people had been bright and happy most of their lives. They had been happy with their wives and husbands, with their children, even with incomes not always large.

Among the 402 (questioned), we found that 53 per cent had been "very happy" all their lives. Forty-two per cent had been "fairly happy"; only four per cent said they had not been so happy; and one per cent said they didn't know.

Few had ever relied on material possessions for happiness. It was nothing they had found in the outside world. Instead, it was a secret; a way of life that no one imposed upon them. They had found an abiding faith, an inner source of strength and contentment.

In other words, the happy oldsters were religious. Ninety-seven per cent of the 402 identified themselves with some church!

The religious people were happier than those who were not religious. And the happiest of all were the very religious.

George H. Gallup
in **Together**

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The longer men live, the more time there is to think; to think is to grow; and to grow is to live.

Edward J. Stieglitz

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The Lord may forgive our sins, but our nervous systems never do.

William James

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It seems as though the second half of a man's life is made up of nothing but the habits he has accumulated during the first half.

Fedor Dostoevski